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ON

THE POWERS

ON WHICH

THE CIRCULATION OF THE BLOOD

DEPENDS.

BY

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XXVI. *On the Sources and Nature of the Powers on which the Circulation of the Blood depends.* *By* A. P. W. Philip, *M.D. F.R.S. L. & E.*

Read June 16, 1831.

It is remarkable that, notwithstanding the great importance of the circulation in the animal economy, the length of time which has elapsed since its discovery, and the constant attention it has obtained, there is hardly any department of physiology respecting which there appears to be greater uncertainty and contrariety of opinion than the sources and the nature of the powers on which this function depends. I propose in the following paper, by comparing the principal facts on the subject, and by such additional experiments as seem still to be required, to endeavour to determine these points. Much has lately been written and many experiments have been made with this view, and it has become customary to look for the causes which support the circulation to other sources beside the powers of the heart and blood-vessels.

It has been supposed that what has been called the resilience of the lungs, that is, their tendency to collapse, by relieving the external surface of the heart from some part of the pressure of the atmosphere, is a principal means of causing it to be distended with blood, the whole weight of the atmosphere acting on its internal surface through the medium of the blood which is thus propelled from the veins into its cavities; and in this way it has been supposed that the motion of the blood through the whole of the venous part of the circulation is maintained. A similar effect has been ascribed to the act of inspiration, which it is evident must operate on the same principle; and this opinion has even been sanctioned by the Report of a Committee of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Paris *, and in this country by men whose authority is deservedly high; and the effect of these causes, it is asserted, is increased by the elastic power of the heart itself.

* Report on Dr. Barry's paper, by Baron Cuvier and Professor Dumeril.

However successfully such opinions might be combated by reasoning on the data we already possess, as direct experiment is the most simple as well as decisive way of determining the question, as reasoning on physiological subjects has so often deceived, and the experiments may here be made on the newly dead animal, and consequently without suffering of any kind, I have thought it better that the point should be determined in this way, especially as it is by experiments, which at first view seem to countenance the foregoing opinions, that their supporters attempt to establish them, with the effect, as it appears to me, of withdrawing the attention from the powers on which the circulation actually depends, and introducing considerable confusion respecting a question so immediately connected with the phenomena and treatment of disease.

With a view, therefore, to submit the foregoing opinions to this test, the following experiments were made, in which Mr. Cutler was so good as to assist me.

Exp.—A rabbit was killed in the usual way by a blow on the occiput, and the chest opened on both sides so as freely to admit the air. The lungs were then inflated eight or ten times in the minute by means of a pipe introduced into the trachea; the circulation was found to be vigorous. On laying bare one of the femoral arteries, it was observed to pulsate strongly; and on wounding it, the blood, of a florid colour, indicating that it had undergone the proper change in its circulation through the lungs, gushed out with great force; and on introducing the hand into the thorax, the heart was found to be alternately distended and contracted as in the healthy circulation.

Exp.—All the vessels attached to the heart in the newly dead rabbit being divided, and the heart removed, it was allowed to empty itself. Its contractions continued to recur, and in their intervals it assumed a perfectly flat shape, proving that the elasticity of the heart in this animal is so small that it cannot even maintain the least cavity after the blood is discharged.

It appears from these experiments that the circulation was vigorous when none of the causes to which the motion of the blood in the veins have been ascribed existed. In the first experiment the chest being freely opened on both sides, so that the play of the lungs on inflating them could be seen, all effect on the heart either of the resilience of the lungs or the act of inspiration, was evidently prevented; and in the second, it was proved that no sensible

elasticity of the heart existed; yet while artificial respiration was performed we could perceive no abatement in the vigour of the circulation.

It is to be observed, that all these means can act only in one way in promoting the circulation, namely, by giving to the heart the power of suction; that is, by producing a tendency to vacuum in its cavities, in consequence of which the pressure of the atmosphere propels the blood from the veins into them, that of the arteries being prevented from returning to the heart by the valves at their origins. But all, as far as I know, who have either made experiments with a view to prove the supposed effect of these means on the circulation, or who have sanctioned the inferences from such experiments, have overlooked the circumstance that the veins being tubes of so pliable a nature that when empty they collapse by their own weight, whatever may be said of the effect of such causes in favouring a horizontal or descending motion of the blood, it is impossible that an ascending motion could be produced in them on the principle of suction. As far as the heart may possess any such power, its tendency must be to cause the vessel to collapse, not to raise the fluid it contains.

That the resilience of the lungs as far as they possess this property, and the act of inspiration, tend to dilate the heart and large vessels within the chest, is evident; but the former is very trifling, if it exist at all, except as far as it depends on the mere weight of the lungs; and the latter in common breathing is little more efficient, although the effect of respiration on the brain, when any part of the cranium is removed, sufficiently attests that it has a certain effect. When the breathing is so laborious as essentially to influence the circulation, it evidently tends to derange the regular flow of the blood towards the heart, inspiration of course acting interruptedly; whereas it is only necessary to inspect the chest of any of the more perfect animals immediately after death, and while artificial respiration is being performed, provided death has not been caused by great loss of blood, or an extreme and instantaneous impression on the nervous system, to see that the blood flows uniformly towards the heart with no interruption but that which the contraction of the heart itself occasions.

The elasticity of the heart is greater in some animals than in the rabbit; but it is in all cases very inconsiderable. The heart of the tortoise is the most elastic I have examined; yet even it may be compressed during its diastole by a force not sensibly greater than is sufficient to compress other muscles in a

state of relaxation. Besides, the auricles possess little or no elasticity; and whatever the elasticity of the ventricles may be, it can have no effect on the blood in the veins, because they receive their blood from the auricles which are contracting during the diastole of the ventricles. To these statements it may be added, that in many of the inferior animals the foregoing supposed causes of the venous part of the circulation evidently have no existence, and that, with the exception of the elasticity of the heart, they have no existence in the fetal state in any.

We have just seen from direct experiment, that the circulation of the blood goes on as usual when all these causes have wholly ceased to operate.

I shall now take a rapid view of the facts which, as far as I am capable of judging, leave no room of doubt respecting the sources of the power on which this function depends.

It is so evident to those in the least acquainted with the animal economy that the contractile power of the heart is one of the chief of these sources, that it would be superfluous to enumerate the proofs of it; yet even this position has been denied, and that by a writer of no mean abilities. The opposite error, however, is the more common; and not a few have ascribed, and even still do ascribe, the motion of the blood throughout the whole course of circulation to the contractile power of the heart alone, although it would not be difficult to prove that to drive the blood through one set of capillary vessels, and still more through two or three sets of such vessels,—for in man himself, in one important part of the circulation, it is carried through two, and in some animals through three, sets of capillaries before it returns to the heart,—I say it would not be difficult to prove that to drive it through one set of capillaries, at the rate at which the blood is known to move, would require a force capable of bursting any of the vessels. But here, as in the former instance, it is better to appeal to the evidence of direct facts than to any train of reasoning; and there is no want of such facts to determine the point before us, some of which I formerly had the honour to lay before the Society, and others are stated in my Treatise on the Vital Functions. The most decisive is, that the motion of the blood in the capillaries continues long after the heart has ceased to beat and the animal in the common acceptation of the term is dead, even in the warm-blooded animal, for an hour and a half or two hours, and it is not for some time sen-

sibly affected by the heart's ceasing to beat; nor does this arise from some imperceptible impulse still given by the heart, because when all the vessels attached to this organ are secured by a ligature and the heart cut out, the result is the same.

That the circulation in the capillary vessels is independent of the heart, may be shown by various other means. On viewing the motion of the blood in them, with the assistance of the microscope, it may generally be observed that it is moving with different degrees of velocity in the different vessels of the part we are viewing, frequently more than twice as rapidly in some than in others. Were the motion derived from a common source, this could not be the case. It is impossible, in the motion of the blood in the capillaries, in the least degree to perceive the impulse given by the beating of the heart, which causes the blood in the arteries to move more or less per saltum, the motion of the blood in the former being uniform as long as they retain their vigour, and the necessary supply of blood is afforded from the larger vessels. I have found by experiments very frequently repeated*, that the motion of the blood may be accelerated or retarded in the capillaries by stimulants or sedatives, acting not through the medium of the heart, but on these vessels themselves. Nay, so little effect has the action of the heart on the motion of the blood in the capillaries, that I have found that when the power of the capillaries of a part is suddenly destroyed by the direct application of opium to them, the motion of the blood in them instantly ceases, although the vigour of the heart and that of every other part of the sanguiferous system is entire †.

If the circulation in the capillaries be thus independent of the heart, it is evident that the influence of that organ cannot extend to the veins. On comparing the whole of the foregoing circumstances, is it not a necessary inference that the motion of the blood in the veins, like that in the capillaries, depends on the power of these vessels themselves? But that we may not trust to any train of reasoning, where it is possible to have recourse to direct proof, I made the following experiment, with the assistance of Mr. Cutler.

Exp.—In the newly dead rabbit, in which the circulation was maintained by artificial respiration, the jugular vein was laid bare for about an inch and a half; a ligature was then passed behind the part of the vessel nearest to the

* My Treatise on the Vital Functions. † Ibid.

head, and the animal was so placed that the vein was brought into the perpendicular position, the head of the animal being undermost, so that it was necessary for the vein, in conveying the blood to the heart, to convey it perpendicularly against its gravity. The ligature, which was placed at what was now the lowest part of the exposed portion of the vein, was suddenly tightened, while Mr. Cutler and myself observed the vessel. The blood in the part of the vein between the ligature and the heart was instantly and completely expelled, as the transparency of the vessel enabled us to perceive. The vessel itself wholly collapsed, proving that all its blood had entered the heart, so that to a superficial view there seemed to be no vessel in the part where a large dark-coloured vein had just before appeared. In the mean time, on the other side of the ligature, the vein had become gorged with blood.

In the foregoing experiment we see the blood rising rapidly against its gravity, where all causes external to the vessel on which the venous part of the circulation has been supposed to depend, had ceased to exist, and the vis à tergo was wholly destroyed by the ligature.

By a similar experiment, the power of the arteries in propelling the blood may also be demonstrated.

Exp.—In a newly dead rabbit, the circulation being supported by artificial breathing, the carotid artery was laid bare for about an inch and a half. The animal was so placed as to keep the vessel in the perpendicular position, the head being now uppermost. A ligature was passed behind that part of the vessel which was next the heart, and Mr. Cutler and myself observed the vessel at the moment the ligature was tightened. The artery of course did not collapse as the vein had done in the preceding experiment; but the blood was propelled along the vessel, so that it no longer appeared distended with it. It was at once evident, from the change of appearance in the vessel, that the greater part of the blood had passed on in a direction perpendicularly opposed to its gravity. It is worthy of remark, that the blood of the artery was propelled neither so rapidly nor so completely as that of the vein, the cause of which will be evident in the observations I am about to make on the nature of the function and powers of these vessels.

When the whole of the preceding facts are considered, it will, I think, be admitted that the circulation is performed by the combined power of the heart

and blood-vessels themselves, and that no auxiliary power is necessary for its perfect performance. Here, as in other cases, the more we study the operations of nature, the more direct and simple we find them. The resilient power of the lungs and elasticity of the ventricles of the heart, as far as they exist, favour the free entrance of the blood into these cavities, an office adapted to the feebleness of such powers, which, in many animals we have seen, have no existence. Their operation is similar, but probably much inferior, to the elastic power of the arteries, by which the ingress of the blood suddenly impelled into them by the systole of the heart, is rendered more free than it would have been had these vessels tended to collapse in the intervals of its contractions. Had the blood flowed into them in a continued stream, and been carried through them by their own powers alone, their elasticity would evidently have impeded, not promoted, the circulation through them. Thus the veins, where these conditions obtain, are so pliable that they collapse by their own weight, and hence it was that in the preceding experiments the vein carried on its blood so much more rapidly and completely than the artery, which felt the want of the impulse it receives from the heart, that at once assists in propelling its blood, and through the blood stimulates the vessel itself. The action of the vein was perfect; it possessed all its usual powers, which reside in itself alone.

It only remains for us to inquire into the nature of the power by which the heart and blood-vessels maintain the circulation. Respecting the nature of the power of the heart there cannot be two opinions. It is evidently a muscular power. The structure of its parietes is similar to that of other muscles, and they obey all the usual laws of the muscular fibre.

Is the power of the vessels of the same nature? This is a question which has frequently been discussed. The chief arguments which have been adduced in favour of the affirmative are, the nature of their function; the fibrous appearance observed in some of the vessels, which is more evident in some other animals than in man; and the minuteness of most of the vessels, which, if they are muscular, accounts for the difficulty with which the muscular structure is detected in them. The chief arguments against the muscularity of the vessels have been, that they could not be made to obey an artificial stimulus in the way that the heart and other muscles are found to do, and that their chemical analysis gives no evidence of fibrin. Of the latter of these ob-

jections Dr. Young observes, that a part may be muscular although it does not contain fibrin, and refers in support of this opinion to the crystalline lens. The former of these objections no longer exists, the vessels having been found to obey both stimulants and sedatives as readily as parts more evidently muscular. It appears from many experiments related in my Treatise on the Vital Functions, that the action of the capillary vessels is as easily influenced both by stimulants and sedatives as the heart itself; and although the larger vessels are not so easily excited artificially as the heart and muscles of voluntary motion, yet several physiologists have succeeded in exciting them both by mechanical and chemical agents. But there is another argument in favour of the muscularity of the vessels, which, I think, may be regarded as no less powerful. I endeavoured, in papers which I had the honour to present to the Society, and which appeared in the Philosophical Transactions for 1815, to ascertain the relation which the heart bears to the nervous system, which is different from that of the muscles of voluntary motion. It appears from the facts there adduced, that this organ is not only independent of that system, although capable of being influenced through it either by means of stimulants or sedatives, and that even to the instantaneous destruction of its power; but that it equally obeys either set of agents, whether applied to the brain or spinal marrow; while the muscles of voluntary motion obey no stimulus acting through the nervous system, unless it be applied to their nerves themselves or to the particular parts of that system from which their nerves arise. I found from repeated experiments that the vessels bear the same relation to the nervous system as the heart does, their power being independent of this system, but equally with the heart capable of being influenced by either stimulants or sedatives applied either to the brain or spinal marrow, and that even to the instantaneous destruction of their power. They in all respects bear the same relation to the nervous system with the heart, which affords the strongest argument for believing that their power is of the same nature *.

From the various facts stated or referred to in the foregoing paper, the following inferences appear to be unavoidable;—That the circulation is maintained by the combined power of the heart and blood-vessels; and that the power of both is a muscular power.

* My Treatise on the Vital Functions.